
Grief

What is Grief?

Grief is an expected part of life. Grieving is the process of adjusting to your loss and learning to live with the changes. You don't have to like these though!

Losing someone or something important to you is hard at any time of your life. When you're older, it can be especially difficult. Sometimes life begins to feel like a series of losses, which can be particularly hard to cope with because they come with other problems as well: Financial difficulties, poor health or little family support nearby.

What causes it?

Grief is not only caused by death. Other losses can also cause grief:

- Separation or divorce
- Ill health, disability and accidents
- Redundancy or retirement
- Burglary and fire

Grief can be prolonged especially if the person suffers from a chronic illness, such as cancer. You may even grieve before the person has passed away. If they suffer from dementia you may grieve, while they are still living, the person you knew and loved is no longer there.

How does grief feel?

Grief is not just sadness. It's a whole range of feelings and experiences. Your feelings are subjective and unique. No one else can determine the weight or significance of your feelings. Sometimes people are overwhelmed by intensity of their feelings. Your mood may change quickly and often and that is normal.

*It is normal to feel
helpless and to be
filled with longing.*

You may feel:

- Shocked
- Numb
- Angry and resentful
- Relieved
- Sad
- Regretful
- Guilty
- Anxious
- Tired, exhausted and disorganised
- Yearning

You may experience:

- Physical discomfort
- Lack of concentration
- Sleep disturbances
- Preoccupation with thoughts of the person
- The person still with you
- Confusion
- Denial

Coping with Grief

Everyone grieves differently and shows their grief in different ways, even for the same loss. Grief is unique to you and to that loss. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. How you experience grief depends on a lot of things including what support you have, your personality, and what losses you have had in the past.

*Grief is a normal part of life.
Be easy on yourself. Give
yourself time. Take it easy.*

Sooner or later there are 3 reactions to the death of a loved one that you need to go through:

- Realise that the person has died and realise the pain that that loss holds for you.
- Recognise the significance of this loss for you and your life.
- Rebuild your life without the person who has died.

How to Best Help Others in Grief

When helping a friend who is grieving all you have to do is be around. Let your friend know that you understand they are going through a hard time and that you will be there if they want to talk or go out.

Do:

- Spend time and really listen
- Let them know that what they are experiencing is normal
- Encourage expression of feelings in their own way
- Accept their behaviour - crying, screaming, being quiet, laughing
- Empathise - empathy is the basis of a helping relationship
- Try to understand and accept this person, everyone is different.
- Reflect the meaning of their words - let them know you understand what they are saying
- Indicate that grief takes time
- Maintain contact personally or by phone
- Talk about the loss
- Include children in family grieving
- Give hugs where appropriate

Don't:

- Avoid talking about the loss
- Trivialise their loss
- Compare to other losses
- Expect or judge how it should be
- Try to do everything for them
- Use clichés
- Inhibit them by offering advice
- Lecture or reason
- Take the focus away from what they are saying
- Interpret
- Put your feelings on to their situation
- Sympathise or falsely reassure
- Say "I know just how you feel"

Practical Suggestions for Coping with Grief

Mourn: It is important to give yourself time to mourn. Let yourself cry if you feel like it. You're not letting anyone down by expressing your feelings.

Support: Remember you are not alone. Talking about your loss helps. Find someone you can talk to, someone who will really listen - a friend, family members, minister or counsellor.

Rest: Grieving uses a lot of emotional energy and you will probably feel drained. Pamper yourself with hot baths, music, a magazine or a book.

Try writing: Keeping a journal or writing a letter to a friend. Write whenever you feel like it. Putting your thoughts on paper is a good way of getting them straight. You might need to do this several times as your feelings will change. It's also provides an opportunity to look back and gauge your own progress.

Sexuality: Grief affects all of our behaviours and you may experience a decrease in sexual interest or an increase if seeking comfort and reassurance.

Relax: Escape from your grief for a while by listening to some of your favourite music, going to the movies, anything that gives you a rest from it.

The key to coping with grief is giving yourself permission to feel the deep pain and emptiness that comes with losing someone very close to you.

Where to go for Support

Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

Feelings of helplessness, fear, anger, guilt and despair are all normal. It is important that the carer has an outlet for these feelings, like having someone to talk to. The chance to share with others who understand and are also, or have been carers lightens the load and may be all that is needed. *Caring for Carers* provides support to carers by providing a way to communicate feelings that it would not be appropriate to discuss with friends, family or the caree.

Caring for Carers has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

Caring for Carers is situated:

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221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch
Phone: 377 8426
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